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ABSTRACT

The contributions of two black women journalists--Ida B. Wells and Ethel L. Payne--are examined in this paper. The paper first discusses the life and work of Phillis Wheatley and traces the history of the black press in the pre- and post-Civil War eras, noting types of black publications that existed, major problems they faced, and limitations placed on black women who wrote for them. The paper then describes the events that led Ida Wells into journalism in Memphis in the late nineteenth century, and tells of her editorial crusades against lynching, the resulting threats of violence against her, and her move to New York City, where she pursued her journalistic career. Her later career is also chronicled, including continued crusades against lynching and on behalf of black rights. The professional achievements of Ethel Payne are then described; the paper relates how Payne began her writing career during World War II; presents excerpts from her newspaper columns that show her treatment of such topics as political candidates, discrimination, and black activists; notes awards she has won and prominent events in her career; and notes her views on women in the media and the future of the black press. A bibliography of related publications is included. (GW)

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TWO BLACK WOMEN IN MEDIA:
A MINORITY WITHIN A MINORITY

by

Gloria C. Morris

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After a long, bitter battle for equality, women and other minority groups in America are beginning to experience real opportunities in a variety of professions once almost closed to them. Journalism is one field that has been traditionally predominately white and male-oriented. In this project, my goal was to research the contribution that black women have made to American media, and also to produce an overview of the black press in which these women functioned.

Leading journalism histories offer only a minute accounting of women in journalism, and even less of minority women. An examination of studies of the black press, black history, and the black social experience in America did not reveal much more.

Only one woman's name appeared more than once or twice in accounts of the early black press, that of Ida B. Wells. The other black women writers of her day seem to have been limited to the woman's world and viewpoint, and therefore never reached full professional stature. Ida B. Wells, however, addressed the major issues of the day, and carved out a career for herself as a writer who had impact on the thinking of a large audience.

A few black women have had distinguished careers in the black press in modern times. I selected Ethel L. Payne as a modern counterpart of Ida B. Wells, because she, too, has reported on important issues on the national and international scene.

One major problem was in finding examples of each writer's stories. Several of Wells' editorials were finally located in a volume of selected Afro-American documents. Correspondence to Ethel Payne, and her newspaper, The Chicago Defender, went unanswered, but her columns were found on microfilm at the Library of Congress in Washington, D. C. I was also able to talk with a black author and publisher there who is a close friend of hers.

I feel the value of the study is in recognizing the accomplishments of these two outstanding women whose achievements have made it easier for those women who follow.

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TWO BLACK WOMEN IN MEDIA:
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Sex and ethnicity have been dual burdens carried by the black woman who fights for success in any form of American media. Traditionally, communications have been primarily a white, male arena.

However, as difficult and discouraging as the struggle for acceptance is, a few black women were and are willing to face any odds for the opportunity to work in their chosen field.

From Ida B. Wells, who walked the streets of Memphis in 1892 carrying two pistols for protection against lynch mobs, to Ethel L. Payne, the first black woman correspondent to cover the Vietnam War, there have been individuals who have overcome the handicaps of both gender and race.¹

White women in colonial America often helped in their husbands' print shops. Many printers' widows carried on their husbands' trade.² Writing, setting type, and managing

¹Phyllis T. Garland, "The Black Press," Matrix, Fall, 1971, p. 23.

²Marion Marzolf, "The Woman Journalist: Colonial Printer to City Desk," Journalism History, Vol. 1, No. 4, Winter 1974-75, p. 100.

their own businesses, they were among the first professional women in America.³ Still, they were primarily considered extensions of their husbands or fathers.

Black women, at this time in our history, were even further down the social scale. They were toiling in the fields, being auctioned off the slave blocks, working as household servants, and occasionally being treated as family pets.

Phillis Wheatley, generally considered to be the first Negro woman writer, was purchased in the Boston slave market when she was about eight years old.⁴ A frail child, Phillis had miraculously survived the horrors of crossing the ocean by slaveship from Senegal.

The year was 1761, and John Wheatley, a prosperous tailor, wanted a companion to amuse and care for his wife Susannah in his declining years. The slaves in their home already were old and growing feeble.⁵ The little African girl quickly learned English, and also Latin. She was soon reading the Bible, Alexander Pope's translations of Homer,

³Ibid.

⁴Russel L. Adams, Great Negroes, Past and Present (Chicago: Afro-Am Publishing Company, 1963), p. 128.

⁵Benjamin Prawley, The Negro in Literature and Art (New York: Duffield and Company, 1930), p. 16.

⁶Carter R. Bryan, Negro Journalism in America Before Emancipation (Lexington, Kentucky: Association for Education in Journalism, 1969), Journalism Monographs, No. 12, p. 4.

the Latin classics, books on mythology, and English poetry.⁷

At the age of 13, Wheatley wrote "To the University of Cambridge in New England." She translated a poem from the Latin of Ovid, and her admirers had it published. A collection of her work, Poems on Various Subjects, was printed in 1773.

Wheatley's only memory of Africa was of her mother at dawn pouring water in a ritual to the rising sun. Critics find little trace of the African experience in her poetry, but note that almost every one of her poems "celebrates the rising sun."⁸

In 1775, Wheatley sent a letter and a poem to George Washington. His cordial reply closed with the invitation, "If you ever come to Cambridge or near headquarters, I shall be happy to see a person so favored by muses . . . I am, with great respect, your obedient humble servant, George Washington."⁹ Wheatley did visit George Washington, a truly remarkable achievement for a woman of her race in 18th century America.

Phillis Wheatley was the first black woman to be published in this country, but happily, not the last. A century and a half later, it would be a woman, Gwendolyn Brooks, who was the first Negro to win a Pulitzer Prize.¹⁰

⁷David Eggenberger, editor, The McGraw-Hill Encyclopedia of World Biography (New York: McGraw Hill Book Co., 1973), Vol. II, pp. 331-332.

⁸Ibid.

⁹Brawley, op. cit., p. 28.

¹⁰For poetry, 1949. Adams, op. cit., p. 128.

This study will chronicle the professional achievements of two outstanding black women of the fourth estate, and their contributions to the black press. One, Ida B. Wells, was a pioneer in the 19th century. The other, Ethel L. Payne, is a pioneer today. They share a tough-minded, aggressive dedication to reporting the truth in the continuing battle for equality and opportunity for the black-American.

Until very recently, black women in media have worked almost exclusively in the black press.¹¹ This milieu has always differed from the mainstream traditional press considerably. Consequently, it is necessary to examine and understand the sub-society position of this branch of American journalism within which black women have been still a lesser force than their brothers.

Following is a brief overview of the black press in which both Wells and Payne functioned.

Dating back to 1827, the black press is one of the oldest institutions of the black community in America. At that time, the white press had already existed for 137 years, and it would be over three decades before the Emancipation Proclamation.

The first black publication, dated March 16, 1827, was the Freedom's Journal. It was produced by the Rev. Samuel E.

¹¹Changes in labelling of the race came in the 1960's: negro replaced colored, Negro was then favored for negro, Negro went to black, black then became Black. Now the last two are used interchangeably. Roland E. Wolseley, The Black Press, U. S. A. (Ames, Iowa: Iowa State University Press, 1971), p. 5.

Cornish and John B. Russwurm in New York City.¹²

Garland Penn, one of the few historians of black journalism, wrote that the attacking paper, the New York Enquirer, was edited by "an Afro-American hating Jew who encouraged slavery and deplored the thought of freedom for the slave" and who "made the vilest attacks upon the Afro-Americans."¹³

Because the black leaders of the city were denied access to the local papers to respond to these attacks, they felt the only alternative was to publish their own paper.

A "neat-looking, well-printed weekly," its motto proclaimed, "Righteousness Exalteth a Nation."¹⁴ It was more of a magazine in content, although it had a newspaper format.

Roland Wolseley in The Black Press, U. S. A. states that "the little paper must have been aimed mainly at white readers, since the literacy rate of blacks in the early part of the nineteenth century was low."¹⁵ He felt that the editors hoped to influence whites who were in a position to help free the black man. The publishers also needed white support, he says, since black slaves were not able to contribute to it financially.

¹²John B. Russwurm was the first black college graduate in the United States.

¹³I. Garland Penn, The Afro-American Press and Its Editors (Springfield, Mass.: Wiley Company, 1891), p. 11.

¹⁴G. W. Gore, Jr., Negro Journalism (High Wycomb, England: University Microfilms Limited, 1968), p. 5.

¹⁵Wolseley, op. cit., p. 18.

In the 20th century, a publication considered truly a unit of the black press would have to meet the following criteria: (1) Blacks must own and manage the publication; they must be the dominant racial group connected with it; (2) The publication must be intended for black consumers; (3) The publication must serve, speak and fight for the black minority in America.¹⁶

In their first issue, the editors of Freedom's Journal declared the reason for its existence, "We wish to plead our own cause. Too long have others spoken for us. Too long has the public been deceived by misrepresentations in the things which concern us dearly."¹⁷

In 1847, a Negro, Willie A. Hodges, tried to have his opinions published in the New York Sun. Hodges was told that "the Sun shone only for white men; if he wished his opinions published, he would have to start a newspaper of his own."¹⁸

This confrontation resulted in the publication of the Ram's Horn, which appeared in New York in January of 1847. It was one of the earliest of approximately 3,000 Negro newspapers that have been published in this country.¹⁹

Clearly, early American blacks understood the role the written word might play in bringing about change in their miserable social situation.

¹⁶Wolseley, op. cit., pp. 3-4.

¹⁷Lee Finkle, Forum for Protest (London: Associated University Presses, 1975), p. 18.

¹⁸Armistead S. Pride, The Black American and the Press (Los Angeles: The Ward Ritchie Press, 1968), p. 3.

¹⁹Ibid.

Consequently, twenty four black publications came into being before the Civil War, primarily as organs crusading for the anti-slavery movement.²⁰

Most of these publications contained so much opinion rather than news that they were more important as persuaders than as news sources.²¹

After the Civil War, many more black newspapers sprang up in both the North and the South. Some of these publications were intended as all-purpose newspapers, but many were created as political organs, to serve churches, and other special groups.

The pre-war subject of slavery no longer dominated content, and material of a wide spectrum of interest was introduced.

Other social changes in addition to the end of slavery and the war affected black citizens at this time. Segregation became an enforced way of life in the larger cities of both the North and the South.

Earl Conrad, a white journalist who worked for the black press in the 1940's, observed that this segregation led "to a community-conscious press devoted to protest against discrimination as well as to reporting the minutiae of black life."²²

²⁰Garland, op. cit., p. 13.

²¹Wolseley, op. cit., p. 19.

²²Ibid, p. 6.

The black press had been kept in an inferior position by a number of factors that inhibited its full development.

Lack of funds and the necessary equipment to produce a well-balanced newspaper have been the greatest drawbacks to the black publisher. For instance, until recent years, very few black newspapers did all of their own mechanical work.²³ Often the newspaper office merely collected and set up the news, and then carried it to a publishing concern. This procedure, of course, prevented the publication from being truly independent.²⁴

Another major problem has always been the lack of live news stories because the black press generally has not had access to news bureaus and syndicates until recently.

One analyst of the black newspaper has compared it to the small town white paper which depends on a minuscule under-paid and inefficient organization.²⁵

Excluded for many years from the rich markets of nationally advertised products, black newspaper publishers have had to accept almost any revenue they could find to survive. As a result, many of the advertisements in black newspapers have featured products for "straightening the hair

²³Gore, op. cit., p. 11.

²⁴Ibid.

²⁵Ibid., p. 15.

and whitening the skin and for love charms and other items to appeal to the credulity of the Negro."²⁶

Also, competition with the white daily papers has always been difficult because blacks belong to the same language group as whites, share in the same industry and politics, and are generally dependent on the white social life and the white press.²⁷

Another factor is that during the early years, many educated, middle-class blacks considered the black press too amateurish to deserve attention. One journalist of the time said, "There was a class of Negroes who were proud to say that they never read a Negro newspaper. They thought such newspapers were beneath them, that they were too intelligent and classy to be caught with such a publication around their house."²⁸

Born in protest and poverty, the black press nonetheless stayed alive and exerted a powerful effect on a great number of American citizens who were largely ignored by the white press.

In white papers, especially in the South, blacks "did not get born, win scholarships, get elected to lodge offices or die in respectability; they only committed abhorrent

²⁶Thelma Thurston Gorham, "The Negro Press: Past, Present, and Future," U. S. Negro World, p. 17.

²⁷Frederick G. Detweiler, The Negro Press in the United States (College Park, Maryland: McGrath Publishing Company, 1968), p. 5.

²⁸Andrew Buni, Robert L. Vann of the Pittsburgh Courier (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1974), p. 44.

crimes and led depraved lives."²⁹

The few women who worked in the black press in the 19th century have generally been ignored by historians. In 1890, Garland Penn wrote of 19 black women engaged in journalism during this period. His listing of these writers is often the only mention of their names extant in journalism histories today.

In The Journalist, a professional journal preceding Editor and Publisher, the January 26, 1889, issue is devoted to profiles of fifty women editors and reporters, ten of whom were black.

It was the opinion of the editor of The Journalist that the black woman in journalism "occupied a special place because the black man had not contested her every step toward recognition for they had worked side by side on the plantations and continue this arrangement in other spheres."³⁰

This romantic view is not born out by examining the types of material produced by these women. Their work is almost entirely limited to articles on or for children, features or columns for women, or stories for religious publications.³¹

²⁹Ben H. Bagdikian, The Effete Conspiracy and Other Crimes of the Press (New York: Harper and Row, 1972), p. 42.

³⁰Marzolf, op. cit., pp. 103-104.

³¹A black woman in America in 1970 writes, "The black woman in America can justly be described as a 'slave of a slave.'" Frances Beale, "Double Jeopardy: To Be Black and Female," The Black Woman (New York: New American Library, 1970), p. 92.

Just as their sisters of both races who followed, very few women had a chance to write straight news or do general reporting. Fashion and the home page were perimeters not easily crossed.

One exception was Ida B. Wells.

Ida Baker Wells was born in 1862 to slave parents in Holly Springs, Mississippi. She was the oldest of four boys and four girls. Her mother, Lizzie Bell, had been the child of a slave mother and an Indian father. Lizzie Bell was sold a number of times, eventually to a Holly Springs carpenter named Bolling.³²

While working for Bolling as a cook, Lizzie Bell met and married James Wells. James had been apprenticed by his master--his acknowledged father--to Bolling to learn the carpenter's trade. After Wells' parents became freedmen, her father continued to work as a carpenter and her mother as a cook.³³

Wells attended a freedmen's high school and industrial school in Holly Springs. Her parents and three of her brothers and sisters died in an epidemic of yellow fever, and she took on the responsibility of caring for the younger children. Only fourteen years old, she claimed to be eighteen, and found a job teaching in a rural school for twenty-five dollars a month.

³²Edward T. James, editor, Notable American Women (Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1971), p. 565.

³³Ibid.

She later moved to Memphis, and taught in a rural school there and then in the city's Negro schools.

While teaching, Wells continued her own education, taking summer courses at Fisk University. At Fisk, she contributed to the student newspaper.

Ida B. Wells believed in a citizen's civil rights, and she was not afraid to fight for her convictions. While travelling by train, she refused to comply with the conductor's demand that she give up her seat for one in a coach limited to colored passengers. She was forcibly removed.

Undaunted, she sued the Chesapeake and Ohio Railroad and won her case in the circuit court, but the decision was reversed by the Tennessee supreme court in 1887.³⁴

This experience proved to be a valuable one for her, however, because the editor of The Living Way, a black weekly in Memphis, asked her to write a description of the incident and its consequences. He printed her story, and she subsequently contributed to the publication for several years.

She was encouraged by the Rev. William J. Simmons, president of the National Baptist Convention and a leader of the Negro Press Association. She began to write for some of the other small black newspapers that were emerging, using the pen name "Iola."³⁵

³⁴Ibid., p. 565.

³⁵Penn, op. cit., p. 405.

Because she criticized the poor schools Negro children were forced to attend, her teaching contract was not renewed by the Memphis school board in 1891.³⁶

From that time on, she devoted herself primarily to journalism. After teaching school for six years, she had saved some money. She bought a one-third interest in the Memphis Free Speech, and by 1892, she became half-owner.

That year, 1892, was a violent one for Ida B. Wells, and its events changed the course of her life even further than involuntarily leaving the teaching profession.

On March 9, 1892, three of her close friends were lynched. She was convinced that the murder of these three young men had not be committed defending white womanhood, as the white press alleged, but rather because the black men were competing successfully with white storekeepers.

Evidence indicated that their only crime was taking away business from white grocers. These men monopolized trade in the black neighborhoods, and overcharged and abused customers.

The white grocers and their friends provoked a disturbance to get the three black men thrown in jail. The mob then took them from their cells while the authorities made little effort to stop the murders or apprehend the lynchers.³⁷

³⁶Ibid.

³⁷Edgar A. Toppin, A Biographical History of Blacks in America Since 1528 (New York: David McKay Company, Inc., 1969), p. 446.

Wells began to research and investigate other lynchings. Her editorial of May 21, 1892, shook the city of Memphis. She wrote:

Eight Negroes have been lynched since the last issue of the "Free Speech,"--one at Little Rock, Arkansas, last Saturday morning where the citizens broke (?) into the penitentiary and got their man; three near Anniston, Alabama; one near New Orleans; and three at Clarksville, Ga., the last three for killing a white man, and five on the same old racket--the new alarm about raping white women. The same programme of hanging, then shooting bullets into the lifeless bodies was carried out to the letter.

Nobody in this section of the country believes the old thread bare lie that Negro men rape white women. If Southern white men are not careful, they will over-reach themselves and public sentiment will have a reaction, a conclusion will then be reached which will be very damaging to the moral reputation of their women.³⁸

Wells pointed out that "the crime of rape was unknown during four years of civil war, when the white women of the South were at the mercy of the race which is all at once charged with being a bestial one."³⁹

The white papers of Memphis responded on May 24, 1892. The Daily Commercial ran the following story:

Those Negroes who are attempting to make the Lynchings of individuals of their race a means for arousing the worst passions of their kind are playing with a dangerous sentiment. The Negroes may as well understand that there is no mercy for the Negro rapist and little patience with his defenders. A Negro organ printed in this city, in a recent issue publishes the following atrocious paragraph: "Nobody in this section of the country believes the old thread bare lie . . .

The fact that a black scoundrel is allowed to live and utter such loathsome and repulsive calumnies is a volume of evidence as to the wonderful patience of Southern whites. But we have had enough of it.⁴⁰

³⁸John H. Bracey, Jr., editor, The Afro-Americans: Selected Documents (Boston: Aliyn and Bacon, 1972), p. 345.

³⁹Ibid., p. 346.

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 345.

There are some things that the Southern white man will not tolerate, and the obscene intimations of the foregoing have brought the writer to the very outermost of public patience. We hope we have said enough.⁴¹

The Evening Scimitar of the same date ran the Commercial's editorial but also added:

If the Negroes themselves do not apply the remedy without delay it will be the duty of those whom he has attacked to tie the wretch who utters these calumnies to a stake at the intersection of Main and Madison Sts., brand him in the forehead with a hot iron and perform upon him a surgical operation with a pair of tailor's shears.⁴²

As a result of the editorial exchange between the Free Speech, The Daily Commercial and The Evening Scimitar, a meeting was called in the Memphis Cotton Exchange Building the evening of May 24, 1892.

A committee was sent for the editors of Free Speech. Fortunately, they could not be located. The mob demolished the press and the paper's offices.

Wells wrote later, "Threats of lynching were freely indulged, not by the lawless element upon which the deviltry of the South is usually saddled--but by the leading businessmen, in their leading business centre."⁴³

Fleming, her business manager and co-owner left town to escape the mob, and was later warned not to return. Telegrams sent to Wells where she was vacationing in New York advised her that bodily harm would result if she came

⁴¹Ibid.

⁴²Ibid.

⁴³Ibid., p. 346.

back to Memphis. Creditors took possession of the office and sold the shop, and "the Free Speech was as if it had never been."⁴⁴

Wells joined the staff of the New York Age, to which she had been freelancing, and continued her investigative reporting.

She was the first newsperson to compile and publish statistics on lynching. She discovered that 728 Afro-Americans had been lunched during an eight year period from 1884 to 1892. A typical case is that of Edward Coy. Edward Coy was burned alive in Texarkana, January 1, 1892.

Wells uncovered the following facts: the woman who was produced as a victim of Coy's violence was of bad character, and her husband was known as a drinker and gambler. She was publicly known to have been intimate with Coy for over a year. She was compelled by threats to make the charges against Coy. When she approached the black man to apply the match, Coy asked her if she would burn him after they had been "sweethearting" so long.⁴⁵

The fact that white women sometimes preferred black lovers seemed indigestible for the Southern white stomach, although it was common knowledge that many white men had sex with black women.

Wells wrote of Sarah Clark of Memphis, a white, who loved a black man and lived openly with him. Indicted for

⁴⁴Ibid.

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 349.

miscegenation, she swore in court that she was not a white person. She was, therefore, saved from prison, and resumed her chosen lifestyle.⁴⁶

She wrote of Frank Weems of Chattanooga who was spared from lynching only because prominent citizens guarded him until he was safe inside the penitentiary. He had letters in his pocket from the white woman in the case making the appointment with him.⁴⁷

Wells named names, provided dates, places and details of injustice against the Afro-American. She wrote, for instance, of a white man, Pat Hanifan in Nashville, Tennessee, who had raped a little black girl, and injured her for life. He was jailed for six months, discharged, and then became a detective in that city.⁴⁸

She urged people of good conscience to resist lynch law, writing:

Men who stand high in the esteem of the public for christian character, for moral and physical courage, for devotion to the principles of equal and exact justice to all, and for great sagacity, stand as cowards who fear to open their mouths before this great outrage. They do not see that by their tacit encouragement, their silent acquiescence, the black shadow of lawlessness in the form of lynch law is spreading its wings over the whole country.⁴⁹

By publishing facts the public could not ignore, Wells made a major contribution to the eradication of lynching as

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 348.

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 349.

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 351.

⁴⁹Ibid., p. 353.

an acceptable technique for subduing the black man.

Although known primarily for crusading against lynching, Wells did not limit herself to one theme.

In 1893, she edited a pamphlet protesting the almost absolute exclusion of Negroes in the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago.

She organized Negro women's clubs, and initiated such projects as kindergartens and orchestras for the Negro communities.

Personally fearless, she visited East St. Louis, Illinois, following the race riots of 1918 to seek legal aid for the Negro victims of mob assault.

Ida Wells also worked with white women in the suffrage and women's movements, although she distrusted the help of whites in the Negro cause. She joined with Jane Addams in an attempt to block the organizing of separate schools for Negro children in Chicago.

An ally of W. E. B. DuBois, she served on the National Afro-American Council. She strongly opposed Booker T. Washington who advocated a doctrine of compromise and accomodation. She participated in the Niagara movement which led to the founding of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People in 1910, but did not work in the association later because she felt it was not outspoken enough.⁵⁰

⁵⁰James, op. cit., p. 566.

Descriptions of her by her contemporaries paint a picture of a hard-driving newsperson who was able to write for black and white, male and female. For instance, Thomas Fortune, publisher of the New York Age wrote of her:

She has become famous as one of the few of our women who handle a goose-quill, with diamond point, as easily as any man in the newspaper work. If Iola were a man, she would be a humming independent in politics. She has plenty of nerve, and is as sharp as a steel trap.⁵¹

His comments, although highly complimentary, reflect the sexist attitudes of the time.

Miss Lucy Wilmot Smith, editor of the Woman's Department, Our Women and Children Magazine, also wrote of Iola:

Mrs. Ida B. Wells, "Iola," has been called the Princess of the Press, and she has well earned the title. No writer, the male fraternity not excepted, has been more extensively quoted; none struck harder blows at the wrongs and weaknesses. Mrs. Wells' readers are equally divided between the sexes. She reaches the men by dealing with the political aspect of the race question, and the women she meets around the fireside. She is an inspiration to the young writers, and her success has lent an impetus to their ambition.⁵²

Again, Wells' accomplishments are evaluated in terms of the "male fraternity."

Wells often charged that the Afro-American papers were the only ones which printed the truth, and she appealed to the black race to support the black journals in their investigations.

She felt it was her mission to get the facts of these

⁵¹Penn, op. cit., p. 408.

⁵²Ibid.

crimes before the public. She wrote, "the people must know before they can act, and there is no educator to compare with the press."⁵³

Wells made a strong impression abroad as well as in this country. A lecture trip to England in 1892 was financed by the Woman's Loyal Union, a group formed by blacks in New York to support her crusade. Anti-lynching societies sprang up as a result of her speaking engagements.

In the mid-1890's, she moved to Chicago, and helped organize a number of anti-lynching leagues in that area. By this time, she was writing for both the black and white press, including The Living Way, The New York Age, Detroit Plaindealer, Indianapolis World, Gate City Press, Little Rock Sun, American Baptist, Memphis Watchman, Chattanooga Justice, Christian Index, Fisk University Herald, and Our Women and Children Magazine.⁵⁴

In 1895, Wells married Ferdinand L. Barnett, a lawyer and part owner of the Conservator, the first black newspaper in Illinois.

She raised four children while maintaining her writing, speaking and club work.

⁵³Bracey, op. cit., p. 360.

⁵⁴Penn, op. cit., p. 408.

Her leadership qualities were awesome. William E. B. DuBois wrote of Wells leading a group of black people to the Governor of Illinois. The result was that Governor Deneen refused to reappoint a sheriff who had failed to prevent a lynching. DuBois commented that Wells certainly "strengthened his backbone."⁵⁵

In 1913, she was appointed adult probation officer in Chicago, the first of her race in such a post. In 1940, a housing project in Chicago was named in her honor.

Ida B. Wells met a president, too. In 1898, she was a member of a delegation that called on President William McKinley to demand action in prosecuting the case of a black postmaster who had been lynched in South Carolina.

When Wells died in 1931, she was eulogized as a pioneer who began the awakening of the conscience of a nation.

The black press continued to be a powerful instrument in molding Negro opinion behind the fight for equal citizenship. But, at the same time, it has been the object of a great deal of criticism. It has been charged with being "excessively sensational, superficial, bawdy and imitative. It has also been accused of being Communistic, radical, un-American and inflammatory."⁵⁶

⁵⁵W.E.B. DuBois, Horizon, February, 1910, Vol. V, No. 4, p. 120.

⁵⁶Maxwell R. Brooks, The Negro Press Re-examined, (Boston: The Christopher Publishing House, 1959), p. 12.

Many of these publications are reminiscent of the white press during the age of yellow journalism. A good example is the Chicago Defender, which concentrated on scandal and crime stories in its early years. Significantly, it did not really thrive until it became the champion of the black people.⁵⁵

It is now considered one of the three most widely read black dailies, with a circulation of about 35,000 four days a week (1970), plus a weekly national edition. The Defender belongs to the Sengstacke chain, named for its publisher, John H. Sengstacke, which claimed a circulation of over 165,000 in 1970.⁵⁶

The Defender is also home base for Ethel L. Payne, a contemporary black newsperson who champions the cause of the black woman in media.

Like Ida B. Wells, Ethel Payne entered the professional field of communications by a controversial incident. Although she had studied at the Medill School of Journalism at Northwestern in 1940 and 1941, she was working in Japan as a service club hostess.

In a letter to author Roland E. Wolseley, she described how she broke into print.

"I put down my impressions of life under the Occupation . . . these jottings found their way into the

⁵⁵Detweiler, op. cit., p. 27.

⁵⁶Ibid., p. 11.

Chicago Defender and caused an earthquake in the high command. But for the intervention of Thurgood Marshall, who happened to be in the country on a court martial case, I would have been cashiered and sent home in chains for allegedly upsetting the morale of the troops."⁵⁷

Six months later she voluntarily left her job in Japan to join the staff of the Defender, where she has remained in a variety of capacities and assignments.

Ethel L. Payne was born in Chicago, the daughter of William and Bessie Austin Payne. Although tremendous cultural changes have improved the quality of life for the black citizen since Ida Wells wrote weekly of lynchings and murder, Payne has also had to face the handicaps of sex and race in her profession.⁵⁸

In an article for Matrix, official publication of Women in Communication, she recently wrote, "In the vast wasteland of communications black women have come a long way, but it can hardly be said that they have reached the peak of the mountain yet, no more so than their white sisters in the media who still find barriers to progress."⁵⁹

⁵⁷Wolseley, op. cit., p. 206.

⁵⁸Women fight for recognition in all professions. It is interesting that a volume of biographies of women, Notable American Women, was urged by Arthur Schlesinger, Sr., after he discovered that less than one-half of one per cent of the persons in the Dictionary of American Biography were female. It contains biographies of 1359 women, 41 of whom are black. Anne Scott, "Making the invisible woman visible," Journal of Southern History, Spring, 1972, p. 629.

⁵⁹Ethel L. Payne, "Minority Women in Communication," Matrix, Spring, 1974, p. 4.

For many years, Payne covered the Washington, D.C. beat for the Defender in her column, "So This is Washington." Excerpts from some of her typical columns illustrate her style and the spectrum of her concerns. On January 20, 1968, she wrote:

After two weeks in California, I'm impressed by a profusion of confusion among the politicians in both parties. The peace issue has split the Democrats and a prominent Negro Republican complains that the GOP is wallowing in "the status quo" insofar as the brother is concerned.

This week Democrats are holding their state convention in Fresno and it will be interesting to note who among the Negroes will be openly committed to the Peace Party and Sen. Eugene McCarthy of Minnesota, or how many will line up now to go all the way with LBJ.⁶⁰

Another item from the same column shows her support of women in public life. She said:

The most attractive package in the California political showcase is Assemblywoman Yvonne Brathwaite who has proved that politics can be a woman's game as well as a man's.

Her district includes a large concentration of Orientals, most Japanese, who have large financial holdings in the Crenshaw area. By tradition, they frown upon women in politics and they also have some prejudices against Negroes.⁶¹

Always concerned with examples of discrimination, Payne continued:

Japanese businessmen put up vigorous opposition to the erection of a new Angelus Funeral Home in the district because it is Negro owned.

The new firm is nearing completion across the street from the postoffice in a solid Japanese residential and business area. Ironically, the owners refuse to rent or lease to Negroes; yet both the U.S. Civil Rights Commission and the Commission on Equal Employment Opportunity are concerned with cases of discrimination against Japanese on the West Coast.⁶²

⁶⁰Ethel L. Payne, "So This is Washington," Chicago Defender, January 20, 1968, p. 4.

⁶¹Ibid.

⁶²Ibid.

Even though she enjoyed travelling extensively for stories, Payne was always glad to get back to Washington because "that's where it is happening."⁶³

Payne's column often carried celebrity news of interest to the black community, for example:

Yvette Diago Powell, estranged wife of Adam Clayton Powell, slipped quietly into Washington last week under Justice Department escort to testify for two days before the Federal Grand Jury weighing charges of misuse of government funds while he was serving in Congress. This was Mrs. Powell's second appearance before the jury and she came into the District under an assumed name.

Once her testimony was over she was on her own and she made a tour of the Rayburn Office Building where her husband once presided as chairman of the House Labor and Education Committee. Afterwards she told friends that she wanted to go up to Billy Simpson's for chitterlings, a favorite food she can't get in Puerto Rico, but the restaurant sent the "soul food" to the Southwest apartment where she was resting. Mrs. Powell insists that she does not want to hurt Adam, she only wants security for her six-year old son, Adamcito, who continually asks for his father.⁶⁴

Such gossip added spice, but Payne has been primarily concerned with a hard core of news and commentary. This same column also touched on one of her major crusades, opportunity for black youth. She wrote:

With all the talk about more riots to come and the need for crash programs to meet the frustrations of ghetto dwellers, it seems cruel that some of the vital programs instead of being expanded, are being cut out. Such a one is the Neighborhood Youth Corps job program for needy teen-agers which may be cut in half. There are 10 such programs in Washington, employing about 3,000 youth. The White House has ordered a switch of funds for youth training and employment to adult manpower programs.⁶⁵

⁶³Ibid. ⁶⁴Ibid., January 6, 1968, p. 7. ⁶⁵Ibid.

Payne occasionally uses the black vernacular to make her point. Addressing the violence that some black activists urged, she wrote:

Behind that secret or not so secret meeting in Washington last week with Stokely Carmichael and 100 leaders of civil rights groups was a very practical need for getting together to survive.⁶⁶ Some black power advocates are belatedly realizing that while the brother shares their being mad at Whitey, he doesn't necessarily go along with all that burning baby when there ain't no house left and no milk for the baby and Mr. Charley's still in charge and the cats have split the scene.

Somebody said, "Cool it papa," and the wise birds said, "I dig you, so let's get ourselves together." All of which reminds us how right Bayard Rustin was when he told the Mexican Americans, "Alliances are not built on affection; they are made out of necessity and while you may be with me Monday and Tuesday and you decide to leave on Wednesday and Thursday, I'll say bye bye baby. See you Saturday!"⁶⁷

Payne never hesitated to criticize the powerful in "So This is Washington." On January 13, 1968, she wrote:

House Republican leaders under Congressman Gerald Ford are offering a package of anti-crime bills against loan sharking, narcotics peddling and organized gambling...A reporter asked if this wasn't civil rights. It may very well be the closest Ford and company will get to additional civil rights legislation.⁶⁸

The Washington scene has not been Payne's only assignment. Up to early 1970 she was the only black newswoman to be assigned to cover the Vietnam War. She spent ten

⁶⁶Many black women found Stokely Carmichael smugly chauvinistic because of statements like, "the only position for women in SNCC is prone." Robert J. Glessing, The Underground Press in America (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1970), p. 65.

⁶⁷Payne, "So This is Washington," January 13, 1968, p. 6.

⁶⁸Ibid.

weeks there in 1966 and 1967, writing about the experiences of black servicemen from DaNang to the Mekong Delta. She also dispatched stories from Hong Kong, Korea, Thailand, and Japan.⁶⁹

In 1970, she joined a group of journalists who accompanied the U.S. Secretary of State on an Asian tour.

She covered the Asian-African Conference at Bandung, Indonesia, the Nigeria Civil War in 1969, and the World Council of Churches Assembly at Uppsala, Sweden in 1968.

Payne also undertook a number of government posts. She labored as a staff member of the AFL-CIO Committee on Political Education in Washington, and edited and wrote for its publication, Notes from COPE. She also served on the staff of the Democratic Party in Texas.

Her work has won recognition in competition with newsmen of both sexes and both races. Twice she was given the Newsmen's Newsmen award of the Capital Press Club, which she served as President in 1970.

In 1956, she was honored by the Chicago Council on Foreign Relations World Understanding award. Earlier in 1952, she won the Illinois Press Association award.⁷⁰

⁶⁹Wolseley, op. cit., p. 206.

⁷⁰Barbara J. Love, editor, Foremost Women in Communications (New York: R. R. Bowker Company, 1977), p. 494.

Like Ida B. Wells, Payne has worked for the advancement of her race in a number of organizations. She is a member of Women in Communication, Delta Sigma Theta, national service sorority, Sigma Delta Chi, the Washington Press Club, and the National Urban League. She is also a life member of the Metropolitan Women's Democratic Club, Washington, and the NAACP.⁷¹

In her 1974 article on minority women in communications in Matrix, Payne proudly spotlighted a number of black women who are achieving recognition and positions of power in both the black press and the majority media.

These include Hazel Garland, editor of the Pittsburgh Courier, her daughter Phyl Garland, contributing editor to Ebony magazine, and faculty member of the Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism, and Mrs. Ada Franklin, publisher of the Kansas City Call.

Payne comments, "There is a young new breed of black women who have entered the majority print media. With trained backgrounds in journalism, they are far less inclined to accept the status quo for women in general and blacks in particular."⁷²

She cites Angela Terrell and Dorothy Gilliam who have cracked the Washington Post, Jacqueline Trescott on

⁷¹Ibid.

⁷²Payne, "Minority Women . . .", p. 20.

the Washington Star, Charlayne Hunter on the New York Times.

Payne notes that there are no black women yet on network news, but that there are a number of outstanding locate TV and radio personalities hopefully on the way up. (In this article, Payne mourns the death of Michele Clark who died in a plane crash in December, 1972. Clark was a rising star as anchor person for the CBS Morning News. She quotes Pete Hamill in his column in the New York Post: "It will be a long hard time thinking about her dead . . . She was one black woman who was going to be famous and powerful without giving up her blackness and without retailing it either.")⁷¹

What will happen to the black press as white newspapers open their doors to employment of minorities?

Payne says the black press has already been victimized by raids on the best talent in their ranks.⁷² Whether the black press will survive is a moot question. Black leaders feel it is a vital link to ethnic origins in the past, and encourage its support. Recent access to national advertising is helpful on the financial front. However, if the social injustices that sparked its birth disappear, and the black citizen is finally assimilated into mainstream

⁷¹Ibid.

⁷²Ibid.

American life, its major function as a special-pleading institution may no longer be viable.

Whatever the future of the black press, its past and present have been enriched by the black women who have contributed to it.

Today, Ethel Payne is serving as Associate Editor of The Sengstacke Newspapers in Chicago. She is also a commentator on the CBS opinion program, "Spectrum."

A contemporary of hers, Jackson R. Champion, author and publisher of The Grass Roots News in Washington, D.C., trying to describe the essence of her personality, said, "Ethel is often considered abrasive when she cuts right through to the heart of things. She has as many enemies as friends. But, she has survived when other black women have been squeezed out because she is so tough. She is a real fighter."⁷³

Ethel L. Payne has met several presidents, and even travelled with one Chief Executive-to-be. In 1957, she was one of 35 reporters who along with then Vice President and Mrs. Richard Nixon, visited a number of African and European nations.⁷⁴

Because of Ida B. Wells and Ethel L. Payne, trail-blazing with a diamond point quill and an electric typewriter, the sisters who follow will find it a little easier.

⁷³In a personal conversation between Champion and this author on November 3, 1976, Sheraton Park Hotel, Washington, D.C.

⁷⁴Love, op. cit., p. 494.

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